Hotel de Rome
Syracuse.

14th April, [1922]

Dearest,

This is again written in great difficulties sitting beside the fountain of Arethusa (she was pursued by Alpheus as you know & they now spout together eternally) in a glare of sun & dust with Italians asleep, one singing, a man playing a mandoline: a beggar. But the worse I write, the better you must paint: were it not for a picture, I should not bring myself to write at all. We got here last night, & who should we meet driving from the station, but Osbert Sitwell, who stopped the cab & was very friendly, but he is lodged in a Grand hotel outside the town, whereas we lodge in a cheap Italian inn, where no one speaks English. & we get delicious food, & there are only Italian officers & widows, & thank God, no Germans — so I dont suppose we shall see Osbert. There is a courtyard, with two cats in a basket, a waiter varnishing a table & an old woman picking over mattresses: I am rapidly falling

in love with Italy. I think it is much more congenial than France. All the men must be womanisers. The old innkeeper cooks an omelette specially for me. I dreamt all night of Duncan & Carrington. She asked him to get her with child, which he did. This was so vivid I woke & asked Leonard if he would think it a compliment should Bea ask the same of him. But alas — my dream is gone like smoke: Carrington bears none of Duncan's children within her, I'm sure. Aint it odd how all the flowers of female youth will die with their buds unopened — Carrington, Alix, Frances, — This is the sort of thing Leonard & I maunder on about as we sit in the ruins. Last night we explored Syracuse by moonlight. But how am I to describe without boring you, particularly as you wont have drunk a bottle of wine, & be half tipsy as I was! — The bay, the schooners, the blue sky, with the white pillars, like paper, & clouds crossing, & people sauntering, & a man on stilts — no it cant be done. One's mind is such a hotch potch of different things, always on the bubble — I daresay painters are more concentrated, but less amiable & lovable in

their marmoreal chastity than we are - You & Dalen always seem to me, though some appearances are against it, marmoreally chaste - You have cast out so many of the devils that afflict poor creatures like me - Ever since I left Cannes I have thought of you as a bowl of golden water which brims but never overflows. A backhander ? eh ? Well, I am being brushed off my seat by an old man who is sweeping the ground. We have just lunched, & had another bottle of wine. No letters ever get forwarded when one is abroad, except bills & letters about beating carpets - only one from that old lady at Cheltenham, whom Shaw has now been to see "such a particularly nice person" Mrs. Smith says; & as Mrs. Smith also paints, they have much in common. I don't hear my friends ill well, but I think of them all as dead, or far removed behind a painted curtain, which I have no wish to draw aside. I should like to go on travelling from town to town all my life, rambling about ruins & watching schooners come in, & falling in love with Italian girls, who all look like Millais drawings in

the Cornhill. I should rather like to write; which one cant do; but perhaps its nicer to imagine books, which I do all day long, until I have to tell them to poor old Leonard. We spend a lot of time on the balcony looking at people in the street. All the horses wear ostrich feathers. Tell Angelica I woke up in the night travelling ~~from~~ to Rome & found her matchbox. It came in very handy. I have several secrets to tell her, in great private. I have seen three new witcherinas. They sent her their love. I said she had a beautiful tribe of Elves, & ~~was~~ also a crested newt— but this is <u>very private</u>.

NYPL

Did Tommie & Julia confide in you? How anyone can think him attractive, physically, passes me— But I am not a judge of the manly form, I suppose— He reminds me of Georges opera hat— the thing he carried under his arm to make him look diplomatic— & God knows why, here is a letter from ~~him~~ George about some book of his, which he wants Leonard to praise. I dont think I shall ever come home. But please, good Dolphin, write to Rome. You have kept your hair: You are beautiful, beloved, chaste: & I am none of these things

V.W.

HAMILL 6/1/66

Hotel Hasseler - New York.

21st April 1927. ~~New~~ Piazza Trinita dei Monti. Rome.

Dearest.

We got here last night, & found your letter, which I read twice, at dinner, once in the Pincio this morning. So let your modesty, which is only sham after all, hide its head. I am always on the look out for some huge revelation lurking in the boscage about life in your letters. Undoubtedly I shall settle here — It surpasses all my expectations. It is a holiday today & all sights are shut so we have done nothing but sit in the gardens & stroll over to St Peters. I dont know why one feels it to be so much superior to other cities — partly the colour I suppose. It is a perfect day: all the flowers are just out; there are great bushes of azalea set in the paths; Judas trees, cypresses, lawns, statues, among which go wandering the Italian nurses in their primrose & pink silks with their veils & laces & instead of being able to read Proust, as I had meant (by the way he is far the greatest modern novelist,

& I think it would repay you one of these days if you should take to book reading to look at him)
I find myself undulating like a fish in & out of leaves & flowers & swimming round a vast earthenware jar which changes from orange red to leaf green. It is incredibly beautiful — oh & there's St Peters in the distance; & people sitting on the parapet, all very distinguished, the loveliest women in Europe, with little proud heads; — but you will not attach any sense to all this. By the way, I ran into two pictures by Breugel at Naples; The blind leading the blind, one was: but I didn't care for them so much as the London one. Too melodramatic. Then there was a Titian, & some Italians, which we said, loud & bold, as we do when we're alone, were very good pictures. But then the Roman works of art at Pompeii are profoundly depressing. At first I thought the ruins were merely a deserted mining town, but later I became very much impressed; mostly by the hills outside, but also by the colour of the bricks; one or two skeletons, people dead on the top of their treasure chests; & the general atmosphere of

place, which is very strange. ~~In~~ In August 76 A.D. the lava came down & covered the whole town — this you may not know, but really it is necessary to remember it, should you talk about Pompeii. At Syracuse we were exploring the Quarries when Osbert Sitwell & Adrian Stokes came after us. Otherwise, we have met no one. And we escaped Osbert, who was much excited by a telegram to say that Sachy has a son.

I'm sure, to return to your letter, that I should make a vile mother. For one thing (though this I try to hide from you) I slightly distrust or suspect the maternal passion. It is obviously unmeasurable & unscrupulous. You would fry us all to cinders to give Angelica a days pleasure, without knowing it. You are a mere tool in the hands of passion. Other mothers are much worse, & I've no doubt I should be worst of all. Helen Anrep & Faith appal me when they talk of their children. In fact what you feel about marriage I feel about motherhood, except that of the two relations motherhood ~~it~~ seems to me the more destructive & limiting But no doubt I'm merely trying to ~~justify~~ make out a case for myself: there's some truth in

Though: I dont like profound intimacies – not in human relationships.

~~Fr~~ Friday

Now we are just off to our days work – St Peters, the Vatican &c. It is again perfect – hot & still. I dont want to go back to the telephone & the omnibus at all. Why not settle here, rather than Cassis? I believe one could ~~&~~ be more aloof. At Cassis people would come & stay. Here they could only drop in for half an hour. Unhappily, Wednesday is the Rag market day, & of course we shall be gone. What a bore! I shall go to the antiques instead.

But if we come to live here – & really I think we may, should Mervyn take on the Press – then I shall go to the Rag market every Wednesday.

I'm afraid this is a dull damp letter, but then travellers letters always are. But I have tried to be as annoying as possible – to drop a little salt on Dolphins snout so that she may spout columns of fury into the air. ~~Yo~~ You must write to Tavistock now. First defend your position as mother; next as artist. Why do you say that the chief end of life is one's work?

B.

NYPL

1927

HAMILL 6/1/66

Hotel Hassler
Rome.
26th April 1927

Dearest.

You see how hard I work for my picture — or have I the right to exchange for a decoration, or what is my position exactly? It had better be drawn up accurately to avoid those fierce broils which may well break our sisterhood before its over. ~~Ex~~ For example, the Gramophone: a yellow brown object, like Bruno: would you paint that? I am again writing under difficulties with Leonard catching his 4th flea, on our last morning. We are off early tomorrow, & shall travel straight through, & get to London late on Thursday night. Damn it all. The telephone will ring: Raymond will ask if he may come to tea. The only thing that reconciles me to going is that it has set in to rain, & Germans pullulate. Otherwise I only wish to be allowed to stay here — for ever & ever — never to see a soul; to buy a little paper — write a book, as Shelley did, in the Baths of Caracalla. We went to Nemi

yesterday. We rambled over the Campagna on Sunday
I suppose France is all right, & England is all right, but
I have never seen anything so beautiful as this is. Figure
us sitting in hot sunshine on the doorsteps of a Roman
ruin in a field with hawk coloured archways against
a clear green grape coloured sky, silvery with mountains
in the background. Then on the other side nothing
but the Campagna, blue & green, with an almond
coloured farm, with oxen, & sheep, & more ruined
arches, & blocks of marble fallen in the grass, &
immense sword like aloes, & lovers curled up among
the broken pots. Nemi perhaps you have seen. We
lunched at a restaurant hung above the lake, which
is almost round, very deep, with Roman ships
sunk in it, & of the colour first of olive trees
& then of emeralds. It was rather cloudy so
the colour was always changing very slowly, & round
the lake was a little path with horses & goats.
We went down after lunch & found wild cyclamen &
marble lapped by the water. Dear, dear, & then
one goes & sits in a basement in Bloomsbury!
As for the works of art, all I can say is
that Raphael comes out very much better
than I expected. But we had only one
morning. Moreover, your tooth & Duncan's venom

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sweetly though it is ~~gild~~ gilded through a stalk of silver, slightly exhibit my art criticism. (I enclose an ~~art~~ article from the Times on Duncan.) Still I get a good deal of pleasure even from the pictures. How did Michael Angelo paint the ceiling? Slung on a board? What do you think of Raphael? & of Michael Angelo? Please tell me.

As I have not seen a human face, & scarcely an English tourist, for they are all German & Americans, I have no gossip. Tom's father in law has died at Bexhill & Tom is very busy winding up affairs. Dolly has reached England safely, though she flew over the Persian alps. Mary is said to be in a rage because we dont bring her book out at once. As she wont correct the proofs, & perpetually adds & scratches out, we put the blame on her.

~~So~~ I must stop now — L. has caught his flea —

Our only failure is the antique shops: we have beat up & down all the streets in the neighbourhood of Castel Angelo & St Peters without success. I had hoped to bring home all sorts of china; but it cant be helped. The moral is we must come next year. I will try to be more amusing, but I have no wish whatever to see my friends, or to gossip, or to dine with Colefax — ~~[illegible]~~

yours B

1927

102

52 Tavistock Sqre
WC 1

Sunday. 1st May

Dearest,

Damn Mark — I'm afraid I shall have to make an end of our agreement & lose my picture. Directly I get back I'm told that Clive is making Raymond etc. in Paris roar with accounts of my rhapsodies about Italy — how they were obviously all humbug — how horribly bored we both were etc. etc. God knows what I did say. Of course, nothing was said about your reading my letters aloud or showing them. So I suppose I've no right to complain. But it makes one so self conscious if one thinks what one writes to you is going to be thrown round & made up into stories that I am reduced to silence, or mere facts & gossip, which bore me either. So what am I to do? If its not Clive, it'll be Roger or Tommie or some one, & these things always get round in about three days

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& are far more irritating, as you'll agree, than they're worth.

We came back to the usual disaster — Nelly has been having an abscess on her kidneys, & was ill in bed. She's now gone home for a fortnight anyhow, & we are reduced to an old char & in rather a turmoil. People pullulate at every corner. I've just had the strength of mind to say not at home to Francis Birrell; but what with the books coming out & then everybody coming back to London I rather envy you at Cassis.

I shall try to get hold of Quentin. We dine out every night — at a restaurant I mean — so he might come with us.

Let me know what you think about the letter. It's a sad business. How it takes me back to the old days! However, I'm more philosophic now.

y B.

NYPL

HAMILL 2/10/68

101 a

52 Tavistock Square

Sunday 8th May 1927

Dearest,

Well, well. Clive must have a genius for invention. He not only kept them all — Dadie, Raymond, Nancy — some American — on the roar with his account of what Leonard said & what I said, but he made Dadie, who was my informant, so convinced of the 'truth' yet that I had great difficulty in assuring him that the whole tour hadn't been a complete failure. I should be much interested to know why he does this. There must be some obscure jealousy at work I think. He grudges, not your affection for me, which doesn't exist, but mine for you. Or he wants to parade his knowledge of our affairs. You are kind but foolish to hand me on his praises, by way of solace. Don't you know that Serge knows flattery a mile off, & it has no effect on him? But I'm so badly in want of your pictures that I shall risk more indiscretions. Clive, I believe, is

10 Aa v

the only real danger. & he, I hear, is expected at 50 tonight. But warn me next time anyone so malicious is in the house, & I'll change my tone.

I havent as much gossip as I might have, as Nelly is still away, so I cant ask people to dinner, & I am in an unsociable mood. A ring came at the bell last night & we refused to budge; at last we peered out of the bathroom window & saw Julia Strachey standing looking up at us: we ducked, & she went away. But Ottoline is at Gower Street: Vita is back; Raymond is back. Vita I have just seen, but only flying through London, rather distracted. Here's a profound secret (which I expect the whole of London knows) Harold is leaving the Foreign Office. You must admit this is to his credit. He is over 40: has no money of his own: & is throwing up his career just as he's getting to the top. Apparently diplomatic society is so boring that he cant face even becoming an ambassador. Really, I think its a feather in Bloomsbury's cap: a goose feather if you like. No doubt he'll step into something much better; they always do: still, all his relations, Vita says, will be heart broken. She was appreciative, I admit; had passed Cassis on

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Tuesday in her shop, & thought of you. I could not ~~[illegible]~~ hold out hopes that you had thought of her.

I sent you two copies of the Lighthouse, one from the Press, & one from me (but I think I forgot to write your name in it.) I hope you'll write & criticise it. I would like your good opinion, which is more than one can say of most people's. Probably the subject was a little austere. But then one falls in to these things all in a second — I made it up one afternoon in the Square — without any premeditation, that I can see. How do you make up pictures? Suddenly, all in a second? The bore with a book is that everyone thinks they have to talk to one about it. This will begin next week, I suppose: & they will all say different things. & I shall be very angry & very pleased & all the same, rather bored; because I have 2 other books I want to write; but still I should like your opinion, good or bad. Duncan, Morgan, Lytton: that's all, I think. Leonard says its my best book, but then I think he has to.

There seems a ~~fate~~ curse on the Press. We were about to see Mervyn Arnold-Forster & settle the future: & now Ka writes to say he is probably dying: He suddenly became paralysed, & has pneumonia. So what are we to do now? Angus, Leonard says, was cheered by the news, but can we do with Angus? Then our lives have been made a burden by Mary. I told you, I think, how furious she

101b ✓

was that we were not bringing her book out now. She so rattled poor old Angus that he promised to do it by the end of May. Now begins a series of letters & telegrams. One comes to say "Please wire printer to change BOULE on page 79 to BUHL." So we wire printer. Next day another wire, very sorry, please wire printer to change BUHL to BOULE unless you ascertain from authorities that BUHL is correct." I fly upstairs, search through dictionaries; discover that BUHL is the German form of BOULE & is now in use. So we leave it. Next morning comes a long letter marked urgent. She has been to an ~~A~~ antiquary in Surrey & he tells her that the most correct form is certainly BOULE, as that is the original name of the maker, who was French. Still she has her doubts, & will we consult Roger Fry, by whose opinion she will abide? Meanwhile the book is to be held up: Roger is in France: & so on & so on. But I'm not going to renew friendship without an explanation. Doubtless she wont want to renew friendship: But I'm not going to decorate her table (I dont mean aesthetically — to my mind thats my jewel) when all the time she's accusing my heart of corruption & my liver of rottenness. Besides, I should like a good scene. Colefax is testy about the

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Desmond Lund, I hear, & so I'm not invited: but the MacCarthys have netted £700 & are, now, it is said, in the depths of gloom, scraping & paring to pay it off. At least this is Molly's view of it – "What are we to do with all this money? ~~but~~ It only means more debts". but Desmond has vanished to the continent, in the highest health & spirits.

What else? Quentin came to lunch. That boy is really a marvel. He drank two full tumblers of strong Spanish wine, whereas I can only take a wineglass; & it was a hot day; & then he went off to shop, & seemed quite as steady as usual, & came back to tea, & had a long argument with me about poetry & painting. Probably I am almost as spotted with the maternal taint as you are. My pride rises at the sight of him, & I find myself boasting to the char about his height & his age as if I were Aunt Mary. I only wish they didn't both (Quentin & Julian, I mean) think Bernard Shaw greater than Shakespeare. Quentin sees nothing in poetry. For God's sake don't tell me you put in by mistake a drop too much of the old Bell in them. I always thought you were playing with gunpowder in that marriage, & you scarcely deserved to come off as well as you did.

I have written to Mr King

101c ✓

to say that you will take Angelica to see him as soon as you come back. He lives somewhere at the other side of Maida Vale. Burn Wilson's letter.

London is pretty horrid, for some reason: so flat, so obvious, after Rome. But no more of that.

Only to make up for your indiscretion you might tell me what you think of Raphael & Michael Angelo: but not until you've told me about the Lighthouse.

Our motor car depends on the sales: so far much better than Dalloway, but it may stop all in a second.

NYPL

What a terrible letter!

By the way, your story of the Moth so fascinates me that I am going to write a story about it. I could think of nothing else but you & the moths for hours after reading your letter.

Isn't it odd? – perhaps you stimulate the literary sense in me as ~~D~~ as you say I do your painting sense.

God! How you'll laugh at the painting bits in the Lighthouse!

V B.